

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD MEETING
Minutes of July 10, 2018

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair Kenneth W. Goslant, Board members Lynn Doney, Julie H. Goodrich, K. David Maxwell, and Nathaniel Miller. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Brian Hoar (Interim Police Chief), Steve Davis, Chris Knox, Gerard LaVarnway, David Black, John Stevens, Jonathan Spencer, Ken Johnson, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Goslant called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** The Board members and the public were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

- III. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

- IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):** None.

V. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORT

- a. Brian Hoar, Interim Police Chief.** Mr. Hoar is a Police Sergeant in the Northfield Police Department (NPD) and has been serving as Interim Police Chief since Police Chief William Jennings resigned three (3) weeks ago. Interim Chief Hoar said the NPD has been busy recently investigating a home invasion and a convenience store robbery both occurring within a twenty-four (24) hour period. In addition, Logan Potkowski started work this week as a full-time NPD officer. With the exception of the vacant Police Chief position, Interim Chief Hoar noted the NPD now is fully staffed with six (6) full-time officers. He said Officer Potkowski is a Northfield resident and former Vermont State trooper and has all required certifications. Also, a new police cruiser has been placed on order and will be put in service during the current fiscal year. As this is his first in-person report to the Select Board, Interim Chief Hoar would like to know from the Select Board members what information they would like from him in future. Board member Maxwell said they would like updates on any personnel issues and/or budget matters as well as any challenges requiring Select Board assistance. Chair Goslant asked if Northfield was being impacted by the nationwide opiate crisis. Interim Chief Hoar believes a number of local robberies over the past year were drug related and the NPD works with federal and state agencies to help determine which of our residents might have drug connections, etc. Chair Goslant asked if there was anything specific the municipality could do to assist the NPD. Interim Chief Hoar could not think of anything at this time. He noted the Vermont State Police did assist the NPD by responding to the home invasion site with both manpower and equipment. Interim Chief Hoar confirmed NPD officers did follow up afterwards with the victim and the neighbors to help allay any concerns. Interim Chief Hoar said Chief Jennings did an excellent job during his time here and Interim Chief Hoar will attempt to build on his legacy by further expanding community outreach, etc. He said the newer NPD officers will be especially encouraged to introduce themselves around town. Board member Maxwell agreed Chief Jennings made the NPD more visible in the community and he would like this continued. Chair Goslant then thanked Interim Chief Hoar for his report and his good work.

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **June 25, 2018 (Joint Public Hearing).** Motion by Board member Goodrich, seconded by Board member Maxwell, to approve the minutes. Board member Goodrich found one typo that will be corrected. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Doney abstaining.**
- b. **June 26, 2018 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Doney, seconded by Board member Maxwell, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Warrant #01-19.** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Doney, to approve Warrant #01-19 in the amount of \$484,830.98. Board member Doney noted a \$658.58 water bill for operating the Common fountain. He would like a recirculating pump installed to cut this cost. Board member Maxwell noted the Select Board previously were given a \$20,000 estimate to do this. He suggested the Town Buildings & Energy Subcommittee could revisit this issue and perhaps find a more cost-effective alternative. Board member Goodrich noted an \$11,200 payment for a new mower. Manager Schulz said this was a scheduled replacement budgeted for the current fiscal year. Chair Goslant noted of the total warrant amount, more than half was to purchase power for the Northfield Electric Department (NED). **Motion passed 5-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through July 1, 2018.** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Doney, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$92,986.00. Board member Goodrich noted an increase in NPD overtime expenses and asked if this was related to the resignation of the former chief. Manager Schulz said this was a factor but much of it was related to NPD officers taking summer vacation time. Chair Goslant noted another reason for the recent rise in the biweekly payroll amount was the municipal pool opened in mid-June and now lifeguards are being paid. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Approval of 2018-2019 Tax Rates (Homestead & Non-Resident).** Manager Schulz said the Select Board members are being asked to approve the tax rates at this time so the property tax bills can be sent out as soon as possible. He added the process of determining the tax rate begins on Town Meeting Day when the FY 2018/2019 budgets were approved by Northfield voters followed by the finalization of the Grand List by our Board of Listers and the determination of the statewide Education Property Tax Rates (Homestead and Non-Resident) by the Vermont Commissioner of Taxes. Manager Schulz said the Homestead Tax Rate will be \$2.3947, which is about one cent (1¢) less than last year (\$2.4040). The Non-Resident Tax Rate will be \$2.5280, which is about eleven cents (11¢) more than last year (\$2.4148). It was noted the increase in the Non-Resident Property Tax Rate is what the state legislature authorized and Governor Phil Scott (reluctantly) approved. Chair Goslant is concerned about the impact of higher commercial property tax rates on local businesses, etc. Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Miller, to set the FY 2018/2019 Homestead Tax Rate at \$2.3947. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Miller, to set the FY 2018/2019 Non-Resident Tax Rate at \$2.5280. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** Manager Schulz noted the first installment of the FY 2018/2019 property taxes is due Friday, August 17, 2018. Tax bills should be mailed out in the next couple days.

- b. Police Chief Search Committee.** As indicated earlier, Police Chief Jennings resigned three (3) weeks ago and the municipality now is in the process of hiring his replacement. Manager Schulz said a Police Chief Search Committee will assist with the process and will be comprised of himself, two (2) Select Board members (i.e., Chair Goslant and Board member Doney), a member of law enforcement, and Northfield residents. The municipality advertised for three (3) community members to serve on the committee and eight (8) letters of interest were received by yesterday's deadline. Board member Miller noted his wife is one of the applicants so he will need to recuse himself from the selection process. Manager Schulz said two (2) of the applicants served on the search committee when Chief Jennings was hired so he recommended they be excluded in the interest of diversity. There was no objection. Board member Maxwell asked what should be the timeline for hiring a new police chief. Board member Doney would prefer to have someone in place by Labor Day but wouldn't mind if it takes a little longer to find the right person. Chair Goslant asked if the vacancy had been advertised yet. Manager Schulz said he had been waiting until the committee had been constituted to get their input on wording, etc. Chair Goslant felt the advertisement used last time should be updated and sent out immediately. Also in the interest of saving time, he suggested appointing the remaining six (6) applicants to the committee so its initial meeting can be held as soon as possible. There was no objection. Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to appoint (listed alphabetically) Sally Davidson, Eilis O'Herlihy, Rosemarie Pelletier, Phillip Rowell, Merry Kay Shernock, and Judy Wright as the community members of the Northfield Police Chief Search Committee. **Motion passed 4-0-1, with Board member Miller abstaining.**
- c. Authorization for Delinquent Tax Collector to Collect Legal Fees for Tax Sales.** Manager Schulz said it has been the municipality's practice for several years to assess a fee to cover the legal costs related to a tax sale of a property. The fee charged usually was fifteen percent (15%) of the tax amount owed. Manager Schulz, who serves as Northfield's Delinquent Tax Collector, said a new state law now requires the local Select Board to annually authorize the Delinquent Tax Collector to collect this fee. Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Miller, to authorize Delinquent Tax Collector Schulz to assess an amount no more than fifteen percent (15%) of an uncollected property tax in order to cover legal expenses. **Motion passed 5-0-0.** Manager Schulz noted several Vermont municipalities have excluded mobile homes from tax sales since other bidders are unlikely. Since Northfield now has a few mobile homes with delinquent taxes stretching back several years, Manager Schulz would like to draft a proposal to address this. He plans to have this ready for Select Board approval at its next regular meeting (07/24/18).
- d. Union Street Stormwater Basin Project.** Manager Schulz said the State of Vermont awarded Northfield \$175,000 in order to build a stormwater retention and treatment basin near the intersection of Union Street and Water Street. This project includes new stormwater collection lines on neighboring streets. The retention structure originally was to be built above-ground near the Dog River but concerns about riverbank erosion led to the engineering plans to be revised to an underground structure located on a FEMA buyout property near the aforementioned intersection. Although the project engineers gave every indication the underground structure could be built for the grant amount, more recent estimates have the projected cost of the structure at over \$500,000. This amount has not been budgeted by the municipality so Manager Schulz has been meeting with the engineers and representatives from the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) to determine if additional state grant monies might be available to cover this cost overrun.

Manager Schulz said this means the project might not be completed this year, which will also delay the installation of new sidewalks, etc. Manager Schulz did speak this afternoon to someone from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) who indicated additional grant funds were available. However, in order to cut project costs, the stormwater retention basin might need to be redesigned as an above-ground structure. Chair Goslant could not understand why the original cost estimates were so wrong. Board member Goodrich noted Pam DeAndrea from the CVRPC was at the Select Board's April 24, 2018, regular meeting along with two (2) stormwater consultants and there was no indication then the project could not be completed within the proposed \$175,000 budget. She doesn't understand what has changed in this relatively brief timespan. Chair Goslant is disappointed there seems to be no accountability when experts on whom the municipality depend upon in the decision-making process provide such inaccurate information. Manager Schulz noted CVRPC has been very helpful in helping the municipality obtain state and federal grant funds.

Board member Maxwell believes the onus for finding a solution should be on the project engineers. They should bring a proposal back to the Select Board with various options with the understanding the municipality hasn't budgeted funds for significant cost overruns for this project. Chair Goslant noted Northfield has been in the forefront of Vermont municipalities in engineering and constructing stormwater treatment projects. In fact, this project's impact area was expanded to neighboring streets in order to treat additional stormwater and help with Lake Champlain's phosphorus problems. Manager Schulz's recommendation is to hold off on any sidewalk or curbing work until the funding issues are resolved. He will also look at other options if the project cannot be completed this year. Board member Maxwell suggested putting in some temporary sidewalk where needed. The cost would be added to the project budget.

- e. **Proposed Cheney Farm Solar Project.** Manager Schulz said the second public hearing on the proposed Cheney Farm Solar Project will be held on Monday, July 23, 2018, at 7:00 p.m. in the Community Room located in the Brown Public Library (93 South Main Street). Several emails and other communications have been received since the first public hearing (06/25/18) and most oppose the project. Some residents have complained this project appears to be "fast tracked" and the public was consulted only after important decisions have been made. In fact, Manager Schulz said no binding decisions have been made on behalf of the municipality and the public comment period started at the appropriate time, which is very early in the project timeline. Board member Maxwell served on the Board of Village Trustees for several years prior to municipal merger and he said the concept of locating a solar project on Cheney Farm has been floated for several years but there never was a formal proposal until now. He asked Manager Schulz if this current proposal has a timeline with decisions needing to be made by certain dates. Manager Schulz said there was not as the project is still in the information-gathering stage. This is not a "done deal" by any stretch of the imagination. Even if this project is approved by the municipality it still would need to be approved by the Public Utilities Commission (PUC), which probably would take several months to make a decision.

Board member Maxwell said some of the public comments included questions neither he nor the other Select Board members are really qualified to fully answer. He hopes these questions will be directed to Stephen Fitzhugh (Northfield Electric Utility Commission Chair) and/or T.J. Poor (VPPSA Senior Power Supply Analyst) at the next public hearing. Chair Goslant agreed as some members of the public have questioned the advantages of having this solar project located on municipal property, whether it would be better to postpone this project since solar technology keeps evolving, etc.

IX. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Winter Sand and Crushed Gravel Bid Proposals.** Chair Goslant noted the municipality now is soliciting bid proposals for winter sand and crushed gravel for FY 2018/2019. Proposals are due by 1:00 p.m. on Monday, July 23, 2018.

X. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Road Discontinuance Process.** Manager Schulz said the next step to discontinue the fifteen (15) backroads proposed for discontinuance is to hold site visits. He recommends holding three (3) separate site visits of five (5) roads. He figures each site visit should last about ninety (90) minutes. Certified letters also need to be sent to affected property owners, notices published in local newspapers, etc.
- b. **Street Sweeper.** Manager Schulz said the street sweeper was sold today for \$20,000. The proceeds will be put into the Highway Department budget.
- c. **Falls Gravel Pit.** Manager Schulz said the contractor soon will start crushing gravel in the Falls pit. We expect to realize about four thousand (4000) yards. The crusher will be located as far away from adjoining property owners as possible. Chair Goslant wants to be sure the residents will be informed before the crushing begins.
- d. **Vine Street Bridge.** Manager Schulz said a culvert near the bridge going over the railroad tracks on Vine Street is deteriorating and needs to be fixed. The situation is being assessed and since this might be expensive various options are being explored, such as inserting a "slip line" into the current culvert. Chair Goslant asked if state grant funds were available. Manager Schulz said probably not since the culvert is not attached to the road. Board member Maxwell asked what caused the failure. Manager Schulz said this is an old metal culvert that finally rusted out.
- e. **Northfield Falls Culvert.** Manager Schulz contacted the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) some time ago regarding the plugged culvert on the state highway near the Falls General Store. He has finally heard back and it should be cleaned out within the next month.
- f. **Highway Paving.** Manager Schulz said Pike Industries has been in town paving part of Water Street, all of Cemetery Street, and a section of Union Street. They next will be working on both ends of Lovers Lane and the end of Berlin Pond Road where it intersects with Vermont Route 64. There may be about \$20,000 in budgeted paving funds afterwards available for other projects.

- g. Union Brook Road.** Manager Schulz said the Vermont Department of Emergency Management is reviewing the grant application to fix the severe dip on Union Brook Road near the Hockman Hill intersection. Many residents have complained about the dip over the past few months. Board member Maxwell asked what would happen if the grant application is unsuccessful. Manager Schulz said Highway Foreman Trent Tucker is sure the Highway Department crew can fix the dip themselves in a couple weeks. Board member Maxwell would like this problem resolved even if funds need to be borrowed. Manager Schulz estimated it could cost about \$50,000 to outsource the work.
- h. Request for Food Truck on Common.** Manager Schulz said a local restaurateur has contacted him about the possibility of putting a food truck on the Common. This request raises many issues including the parking spaces that would be lost, the impact on other Depot Square businesses, etc. Manager Schulz is concerned if permission is granted for one food truck, it would be difficult to deny approval to others. Board member Maxwell suggested Manager Schulz could prepare a proposal with guidelines and bring it back to the Select Board for discussion. Board member Doney felt the restaurants around the Common should be contacted for their feedback.

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED)

- a. Gerard LaVarnway: Proposed Cheney Farm Solar Project.** Mr. LaVarnway is a critic of this proposed project and has sent an email to the Select Board members (also posted on Front Porch Forum) with many questions regarding the background of this project, whether other possible project sites had been properly investigated, etc. He also would like to receive copies of the public comments forwarded to Manager Schulz and/or the Select Board members to date. Manager Schulz was asked to assist Mr. LaVarnway with his requests for public information. Chris Knox asked if it were possible for Northfield to start with small-scale solar projects such as solar panels on municipal facility roofs, etc. Manager Schulz said such limited projects certainly were possible but this proposal began with VPPSA asking its member public utilities whether they had possible sites for large-scale solar projects that would help them meet renewable energy requirements in coming years. Small-scale solar projects probably wouldn't meet this goal.
- b. Ken Johnson: Union Brook Road.** Mr. Johnson lives near the dip in the road and is pleased a temporary fix has been installed. He asked when a permanent solution is undertaken, it should be investigated first whether water flowing under the road is the reason the road keeps collapsing at this location. Chair Goslant would like Manager Schulz to follow up on this.

XII. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Maxwell, seconded by Board member Miller, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of July 24, 2018.